

PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS

LATEST NEWS

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Nelha looks for its next CEO

The board of directors of Nelha, the Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawaii, has begun a nationwide search for a new chief executive.

"We are anxious to maintain the very exciting momentum that has been generated at NELHA in the past several years," said Ted Liu, director of the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism and a Nelha board member. "Nelha is a research facility and business incubator that has become a model that illustrates the best results from a strong partnership between the state and the private sector."

Nelha began in 1974 when the Hawaii State Legislature created the Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawaii on 322 acres of land at Keahole Point. By 1984 it had become apparent that the seawater being pumped up for ocean thermal energy conversion research could also be channeled into many other profitable uses. New legislation legalized commercialization on state property allowing Nelha to host new tenant business ventures.

In 1990, Nelha was attached to the DBEDT. In 1998-99, the Legislature expanded the activities allowed at Nelha to include other business activities that could enhance economic development and generate additional revenues to support the growing park.

Today, Nelha is "landlord" to nearly 30 thriving enterprises that generate about \$30 million to \$40 million per year in total economic impact, including tax revenues, more than 200 jobs, construction activity and high-value product exports.

Two pipeline systems pump deep and surface seawater to shore 24/7 and a third, the world's largest and deepest (to a depth of 3,000 feet), is being developed now. One of its newest tenants, Koyo Corp. of Japan, has moved from a startup to being the state's largest exporter in less than a year. Koyo desalinates and bottles Hawaii Deep Sea Water for sale in Japan. The bottled water market is so promising that the former CEO Jeff Smith, resigned to operate a Nelha tenant company himself.

In searching for a new CEO, Liu said that the board will focus on recruiting local talent and advertising heavily to Hawaii expatriates who are living on the mainland, but want to return to the islands.

"While we would certainly prefer someone with local sensitivities, we are not going to rule out any candidate," Liu said. "The success of Nelha is too important to the state's economic diversification goals. We are committed to finding someone with the right set of skills to continue the development of our assets there."

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